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ABSTRACT

This Civic Arts Review issue contains an essay by Stanley Manfred titled "The American University as a Civic Institution" which identifies some of the features which have made the contemporary American university a civic institution with important civic functions, and identifies some of the societal contradictions which impede recognition and perfomance of the university's civic functions. Responses to the essay are by Benjamin Barber, Harry Boyte, John W. Cooper, Suzanne Morse, Bernard Murchland, and Carl Pinkele. The journal also includes: Manfred Stanley's response to his critics; an editorial titled "Political Imagination"; and a back page commentary titled "Listening to Walker Percy." (LPT)

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A JOURNAL RELATING LIBERAL EDUCATION AND PUBLIC LIFE

The Civic Arts Review

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A Symposium on

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY AS A CIVIC INSTITUTION

Position Paper by Manfred Stanley

Responses By

Benjamin Barber
Harry Boyte
John W. Cooper
Suzanne Morse
Bernard Murchland
Carl Pinkele

Plus
Political Imagination

An Editorial

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Editorial

POLITICAL IMAGINATION

It was often remarked during the last presidential campaign that the candidates lacked imagination. They did not raise new issues nor did they deal with old issues in fresh and challenging ways. That is true. And we might extend the observation to say that there has not been much political imagination exercized anywhere in our recent past. Clearly then, imagination is a subject we should reflect upon.

There are some pitfalls to be avoided if our reflection is to be fruitful. We might begin by noting that imagination is far too important to be left to the politicans. When we talk about "political imagination" we are talking about a general capacity of a free and democratic people to govern themselves. A reliable axiom here is that to the extent that the people are imaginative so will the politicians be. In this matter as in all others, and fittingly so, the politicians follow the public. Two other pitfalls are to be avoided as well. One is the traditional view of the imagination made popular by some philosophers according to which the imagination is a passive recorder of images, a kind of garbage disposal for the left-overs of so-called higher cognitive activities. We should think of the imagination as a more vigorous and more creative faculty. Another pitfall to be avoided is the romantic view of the imagination according to which it is a power of penetrating into the realm of transcendent truths. We come from another world trailing clouds of glory, said the poet Wordsworth. That is a fine line of poetry. But it doesn't help us much in understanding the political dimensions of imagination, which is a quite this-worldly ability to illumine human problems.

Drawing upon the best thinking on the subject, then, we can sketch a positive theory of the imagination that would have the following political functions:

1. **The productive.** This corresponds to our ordinary sense of the imagination as creativity, the power to make new, to change how we see the world, to rearrange parts. Sartre said, capturing this sense of the imagination, that it is the power to intend a state of affairs that does not yet exist, to insert ourselves into existence by way of the future. In Genesis the deity is encountered as a creator. That we are created in the divine image is a metaphorical way of saying that creativity is the first born of our human gifts. That has been a common perception among thinkers from Plato to Whitehead. Plato talked about the many prophets and poets who conferred splendid boons on Greece when they were under the spell of "creative madness." In modern times thinkers like Whitehead have affirmed the primacy of creativity. It is, Whitehad said, the brute fact of existence, the most basic general character of nature. Creativity so understood ought to be one of the marks of our political life.

2. **The re-productive.** This is the synthetic function of the imagination, the ability to see experience whole, to understand issues in the broad context of a unified viewpoint. Immanuel Kant had this in mind when he spoke of the imagination as the common root of all our cognitive faculties. It is that which organizes our knowledge in a holistic fashion and allows us to see things in their interrelations. Hannah Arendt, Kant's disciple, catches this bridge-building function of the imagination in the following words: "Imagination alone enables us to put that which is too close at a certain distance so that we can see and understand it without bias and prejudice, to bridge abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as though it were our own affair." Words to be heeded by all who would build a global community.

3. **The re-presentative.** This might be called the emphatic function of the imagination. It is the gift, and it is a peculiarly political gift, of seeing things from the point of view of others. This is the use of the imagination that functions centrally in representative democracies. To re-present is to understand, sympathize with and communicate what others think about issues. Kant spoke in this context of an "enlarged mentality," an attitude of getting outside of self-preoccupation and thinking as a citizen of a larger society. To think politically is to think in consort with others, to explore with them common concerns and amidst plurality to reach consensus or tolerable dis-sensus.

4. **The re-creative.** We can call this, quite simply, the story telling function of the imagination. Through stories we first begin to think about experience. The great narratives of our childhood, those stories that all begin with "once upon a time," tell us about our origins, about ends we can hope for and about how to orient ourselves in a strange world. It is helpful to think of politics, as it is helpful to think of education, as a form of story telling.

John Dewey said the imagination was the chief instrument of the public good. Conversely, the lack of it can be said to be at the root of the sense of impotence that casts its pall over our best efforts to deal with political problems. □

A Symposium

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY AS A CIVIC INSTITUTION

Manfred Stanley

There never has been a golden age of university liberal arts, a time when its point was clear, its performance unsullied by conflicts of purpose and patronage. The contrary illusion reflects oases of stable functions such as the cultivation of social and imperial elites, the professionalization of the middle class, and the provision of technical training for the specialized ranks of science and industry. Many people claim that liberal arts education is now experiencing something of a legitimacy crisis. If so, it is because the democratization of access to higher education has undermined the elite selection function of liberal arts education, while the professional, technical and in-house corporate training schools are partly taking over the functions of professionalizing the middle class and preparing specialists for science and industry.

Further, the American university like it European counterpart has necessarily been affected by political and ideological conflicts endemic in the larger society. Much of this conflict has had to do with defining the proper relationship between moral and social theories on the one hand, and professional and public policy practices on the other. The university is one of the major institutions that people expect to mediate and reconcile the vocabularies of theory and practice in our civilization. Hence, the administrative and educational practices of the modern university cannot remain unaffected by larger events. The popularity of the university is largely due to the commodity value of certification in the labor markets of society. As this commodity value declines, the legitimacy of the university liberal arts tradition comes increasingly into question. If there is no lasting supra-economic justification for such education beyond cosmetic prestige, the university may in time let liberal arts atrophy into a peripheral service function or give it up in favor of frankly market relevant training programs. That would mean the end, as well, of any hope of conceiving education for the professions as something more than training and socialization for guild practices and interests.

(Manfred Stanley is Professor of Sociology at Syracuse University and the author, among other works, of **The Technological Conscience: Survival and Dignity in an Age of Expertise.***)*

Recent commentaries on the humanities strive to provide a rationale for the humanities in the universities and society generally. The National Endowment for the Humanities Report of 1988, authored by Lynne V. Cheney, is among the most thoughtful and provides examples of issues that need further attention and even redirection. At its best, the NEH Report stresses the benefits of the humanities for the cultivation and refinement of sensibilities about life (as in Cheney's moving account of Maya Angelou's reasons for affirming Shakespeare as a black woman). Equally important is her reminder that the great texts of Western civilization reflect not some elite consensus but a debate, often of revolutionary significance, about the nature of human beings, politics and social change. Further, there is her reminder of the harmful effects of hyper-specialization on the life of the mind. There is also a reconciliatory analysis of the ways in which image technologies (e.g. film and television) and books can mutually reinforce good standards for appreciating the benefits of each. Finally, the Report provides heartening and inspiring evidence of the continuing significance of the humanities in the lives of people in everyday society and realistic suggestions for strengthening that role.

On the other hand, there are unfortunate features to the Report. Three deserve notice here. One is the manner in which the Report argues against the politicization of historically important texts. This is the lest carefully argued section of the Report. "Viewing humanities texts as though they were primarily political documents" says Cheney, "is the most noticeable trend in academic study of the humanities today. Truth, beauty and excellence are regarded as irrelevant; questions of intellectual and aesthetic quality, dismissed ... The key questions are thought to be about gender, race, and class." One effect of talking this way is the apparent endorsement of a rhetorical distinction between politics and things like truth, beauty, excellence and, as she later says, "the deepest concerns we all have as human beings." This distinction reinforces, rather than argues against, the impression generated by the "politicizers" the Report rightly criticizes: the impression that politics is only to be understood as power and oppression. What is needed is a

reconstituted classical understanding of politics as being about "the deepest concerns we all have as human beings." In this light, "gender, race and class" are central issues for the humanities.

The failure to make this argument has something to do, I think, with the other two unfortunate features of the Report: the absence of any reference to humanities education as a preparation for social and institutional practice, and the failure to provide any educational-philosophical linkage between the humanities and the social sciences. Without reference to some philosophy of practice, there is no credible rationale for objecting, as the Report does, to hyper-specialization in scholarly research. The mere distinction, resorted to in the Report, between specialized and generalized statements is not sufficient. What should we wish to be general about? What standard guides our sense of significance such that we come to see a hyper-specialized view of something as trivial? Efforts to answer such questions have to begin by recognizing the embeddedness of consciousness in practices and judgments about practices. This includes the "disciplines" themselves. It is not enough to recount the percentage of colleges and universities from which one can graduate without having studied literature, history and other features of Western civilization. One must also assess the nature of the damage done to lives and institutions by such neglect. And one should, as well, ask whether any such standard of damage is addressed by courses in university disciplines as presently constituted, such that neglecting to study them makes any real difference. This is tantamount to asking what the benefits of a university education are and should be relative to criteria more concrete than aesthetic refinement and philosophical consolation.

Once this point is acknowledged, the failure of the humanities to assimilate the social sciences can be seen for the educational error that it is. To put it very briefly, the social sciences study the origins, applications and unanticipated consequences of the life of the mind. To be sure, they do not stand apart from the life of the mind. But what they study is persons, organizations, institutions, communities and societies of all sorts as forms of practice which constitute the contexts of consciousness and its forms. Included in this is (or should be) inquiry into the socio-political origins of the disciplines themselves. If the humanities are about our dreams and dramas, the social sciences are about their practical origins, achievements and failures. In a larger sense – and this was once clearly the case during their founding phases when social scientists were professors of such things as moral philosophy – the social sciences are part of the humanities.

We must now ask what perspective on the university as an institution accomodates such arguments as have just been made. The answer, I propose, is to view the university as a public or civic institution. In fact, the civic purposes of liberal education are becoming popular again among some academics and foundation officials. Centers or institutes for the study of civic issues are spreading. As yet, however, talk of civic education is fairly vague and hortatory. This essay tries modestly to reduce the vagueness a bit. The argument proceeds in two steps. First, I identify some of the features of the contemporary American university that have made it, in quite a profound sense, a civic institution with important civic functions. Second, I discuss some of the societal contradictions that impede recognition and performance of the university's civic functions. If these contradictions are understood explicitly in terms of their educational significance, a consideration of them might provide an opportunity to characterize the civic benefits of a university education more adequately, and to point a way to its reform in the name of such an outcome.

"The university is one of the major institutions that people expect to mediate and reconcile the vocabularies of theory and practice in our civilizations."

The University's Emergent Civic Functions

The term "civic institution" is a controversial one. We may define it sufficient for our purposes as any institution central to the production or maintenance of goods defined by a large majority of citizens as vital to the material and moral prosperity of the commonwealth. In a modest sense, all major institutions today have civic significance according to this definition for at least two reasons. One is the ethos of democracy itself which stresses the transformation of all political subjects into participating citizens. Given such an expectation, all institutions come to be assessed over time not only in terms of their specialized outputs, but by their ability to contribute as well to this more ultimate democratic goal. The second general reason for the growing civic significance of all institutions is the world-wide trend toward systemic integration of nations and institutions under the impetus of science, technology and commerce. Such massive interdependence has moral as well as factual ramifications in that people are led gradually to evaluate whole civilizations in terms of holistic system performance standards. Under such circumstances, all definitions of the boundary between public and private life become increasingly controversial.

The American university did not formerly have civic significance in the massive sense it has come to have since World War II. The change is due to large demographic increases in the university's client population, the expanded social domain of the university's credentialing authority, and the increased responsibility for sponsoring social mobility through open-enrollment and remedial education programs. As a consequence, the modern American university has taken on some quasi-sacred functions in the civic order that the church once had relative to society viewed as a religious community. A brief classification of four such quasi-sacred functions will clarify the point.

First, the university articulates moral order. This is not to say the university generates or creates moral order for the larger society (though it contributes to that). More often than not, the university is beholden to other institutions and interests for conceptions of order. But the university is expected to mediate and reconcile these conceptions to some extent, at least to baptize some of them with the holy water of certification. For example, consider how university curricula struggle with multiple "theologies" of reality such as models of explanation, of moral (e.g. cost-benefit) evaluation, and of historical motion (e.g. "progress" and socio-economic "development").

Second, the university peacefully strives to integrate the interests of the private psyche into the societal division of labor (i.e. to reconcile modern society's understanding of subjectivity and objectivity). Since society is never historically static, the university must adapt its practices not only to multiple views of reality but also to the brute factual demographic and structural fluctuations of the society itself. These fluctuations generate anxieties and unpredictable destinies that people expect the university to help them interpret, often in terms of theories of justice. With the expansion of the adult education programs, the university is becoming a potential center for life-long personal reflection on the relations between theory and practice in the world. In that sense, the "ivory tower" is taking some of the features of a monastery, a temporary refuge from the immediate secular pressures of decision, a retreat for reflection and life-review, a repository of moral resources such as books, teachers and conversational norms of equality.

Third, the university is a sanctuary institution. That is, it acts as an intellectual proving ground for schemes of moral revolution and world reconstruction which, were they attempted "in the streets," would precipitate chaos. The university sponsors moral combat in which ideas can be tested short of mortal combat. From this theological point of view, so to speak, many activities often regarded as of secondary interest to labor market functions take on greater significance (e.g. curriculum experiments, textbook decisions, administrative styles, friendship networks, standards of conversational civility).

Finally, in a mass democracy the university is often called upon to reconcile the general calling of citizenship, in which we all share, with the particular callings of the labor market in which we do not. This is the basic problem of civic education. Since the vocabulary of callings is not widely familiar, a brief word about it is in order. The idea of the general calling derives from the Puritan religious roots of American democracy. I use the term "general calling" here in its democratic secular sense which has some formal similarities with the puritan religious understanding. As the church has its truths, so the democratic public has its constitutional traditions. Both are open to individual interpretation. According to the Christian and the democratic perspectives, such interpretation is a duty one owes to the community because conformity has dignity only if assented to by conscience. As the demands of a Christian's vocational calling do not excuse him or her from the duties of the general calling as a member of the Christian community, so the vocational duties of the functionary do not excuse him or her from the citizenship duties shared with all members of a democratic polity. The vocabulary of interest group politics has all but obscured the notion of citizenship as a general calling. It survives in the national service tradition, jury duty, and of course in the current talk of civic education.

The question of civic education, then, is how we should understand anything (liberal arts, vocational training, specialized occupations etc.) in light of the public good. One need not be unduly complex about what that means in very general terms. The public good is what we as citizens feel we have in common: our rights; our concern for our potential vulnerability as victims of injustice; our collective civic aspirations revealed in the narratives, rituals and achievements we celebrate; and the quality of our history not just as individuals living or dead but as occupants of the office of citizen. The public good is constituted by how well the citizenry understands and addresses together important questions arising from institutional practices, and the operations of civil society generally, to which no expert answer can exist because such questions are fundamentally political in nature. That is, they require collective civic judgment. Such questions constitute the civic dimension of any practice in which we engage. The object of civic education can never be known precisely. Indeed, in our pluralistic society, many people despair of talking about such matters coherently at all. However, conclusions must be drawn from time to time if there is to be any such things as public policy. The methods for drawing such conclusions constitute the technical challenge of civic education.

A strongly prescriptive stance toward civic education defined in this way would espouse methods that can generate policy conclusions. This view is open to the important objection that it would shift the tasks of legislation from the Forum to the Classroom. A weaker, more pedagogically appropriate, conception of civic education would recommend methods that illuminate, without legislating, the public dimension of the origins, functions and

significance of all ideas and practices. Here the task is to prepare students to understand the ways in which all education is partly political. This is because ideas and practices constitute the social world that begets problems of justice regarding societal organization and resource allocation. It is not just our delegates and experts but we all, as both agents and patients of civil life, who comprise the forum of public conscience.

It is reasonable to say that many Americans now vaguely assume continuous reflection on such matters to be a civic duty of the university. That this duty is as yet superficially articulated should not be surprising. The connections between education and the practices of public life are complex and obscure. Further, the cloistered collegiate tradition of liberal arts does not prove helpful here. This tradition, which one might label the sectarian view, seems to assume that something needs to be set aside by means of which issues of public philosophy can be exposed to students in a disciplined manner. Great Books, special courses, time periods, and residential collegiate communities have all been candidates for what allegedly needs to be reserved for this purpose. We sense this attitude in the following comment by Alexander Meiklejohn, in a 1957 address to Saint John's College: "The combining of the university and the college into a university college has torn into fragments the community of learning which the older college intended to be. How shall the damage be repaired? First of all, it must be separated from the university, must become a distinct and independent institution, aware of its own purpose, which is radically different from that of the university, and resolute in the pursuit of that purpose." This compartmentalized approach seems to reflect an unspoken assumption that our problem with higher education consists in a conflict between advocates of the sacred and public concerns of liberal arts education, and the private self-aggrandizing motives of vocationalism. In this view, some sacred zone, so to speak, needs to be set aside in which students can be exposed to the icons of the liberal arts and civic traditions.

In a more philosophically elaborated version of this argument, the intellectual historian of education, Bruce Kimball, identifies two traditions of liberal arts, the philosophical-scientific and the rhetorical-interpretive. According to Kimball, the former, now associated with "majors" and "departments" within the organization of the university, is irreconcilable with the latter as an organizing principle for undergraduate education. This is because "the specialized pursuit of truth through control of a putatively neutral and objective method fundamentally conflicts with the training of virtuous citizens who are committed to the historical traditions of their community." Against any vision of "intertwining," Kimball says that we can choose between them or "incorporate them dialectically into the colleges and universities by instituting opposing faculties dedicated to one or another conception." We cannot "recommend to any zoo that the lions and lambs of this world be caged together..."

The arguments in favor of such a view are historically and experientially plausible but not, in my view, decisive. Much remains to be discussed before capitulating to such segregated ways of thinking. All disciplines and professions are invented practices which embody, among many other things, political issues, purposes and functions. In place of "sectarian" segregation is needed, not a utopian "seamless web," but some more integrated perspective. As gatekeeper to the arenas of public practices, the university dispenses the credentials that are the substance of modern

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intellectual property qualifications and hence, as land once was, the foundation of public personality. Science and technology, industrial and government service, the professions and the human service occupations are the public forms of personal action in the world with which the university is most directly concerned through its credentialing authority. The civic coherence or incoherence of all these practices is prefigured in everything that transpires in the university: not only the curriculum but administrative organization, managerial routines, budget decisions, collegial networks, conversational cultures, contract relations, research investment, ways of teaching the disciplines and the professions. The university is not a collegiate tower but a worldly institution. We should follow it into the world with our questions about the political applications of all concepts, including "truth" and "rhetoric."

Obstacles to the University's Civic Functions

Anyone disposed to enact such a perspective is confronted with several obstacles. These are characteristic trends of modern civilization manifested in the university's present organization and self-understanding as a "multiversity." One trend is the social division of labor (e.g. sectoral distinctions like "polity," "economy" and "society;" occupational specialization; bureaucratization; institutional speciation: role particularizations). Another is an example of the first: the spread of the principle of professionalism. A third is the increasingly abstracted sense of the office of citizen in a specialized and fragmented environment. These phenomena have resulted not only in social forms of pluralism but also in cognitive pluralism, fundamentally different accounts of the "real" world and how it works. Even those disposed to try have found it very difficult to agree on what is meant concretely by civic education. To understand why let us look more closely at these trends as obstacles to civic education.

Social differentiation. One of the central features of historical sociology's account of modernization is the concept of "social differentiation," the emergency of specialized institutional domains with their own reality definitions, conceptions of the person, values, concepts of public, and policy orientations. In the literature of the social sciences, four such institutional domains have received the most attention: the market, professions, corporations, and the polity. Recently, religious confessional communities have also received renewed attention.

In America especially, the market is the ideologically dominant sector and, of course, has long had devoted to its study the discipline of economics. Professions are not studied by a single discipline but are supposedly identified by a loose common ethos (professional ethics) which has now becoming a growth industry in philosophy. The concept of professionalism has so deeply affected the scholarly disciplines that we now speak, say, of professional sociologists. In some disciplines the process has gone so far as to generate licensure struggles. The term corporation applies not just to industrial firms but increasingly to most organizations (churches, hospitals, universities, governments) as they take on the forms and alleged imperatives of corporate organization. Corporation means that our environment is increasingly dominated by what some call artifical persons whereas our political traditions were fashioned for an environment of natural persons. There is no single discipline that studies corporations, but the intellectual movement called general (or cybernetic) systems theory derives its rationale partly from the organizational complexities of the corporate environment. The increasing influence of managerial styles of thought in professional education (business management schools, formal administrative modeling, personnel administration) reflects the corporatization of society. Finally, there is the civic humanist tradition of the polity, alive still in some quarters of political science and in some versions of the institutions of town councils, legislatures, voluntary associations and religious congregations.

Such social differentiating trends have not gone unchallenged. Centripetal counter-forces like science, technology, imperialism and world commerce argue for the integration of society under the authority of a single institutional principle. The main secular candidates for such integral public principles in the United States, as I indicated, have been the "market," "corporations," "profession," and some version of "civic virtue." Thus, idolators of the market principle perceive utility calculations and self aggrandizement in all aspects of experience. The idolators of corporatism believe there is nothing that cannot be defined, integrated or managed by those prepared to use the managerial science of organization. The idolators of professionalism invest their faith in an abstract ethos of discipline and service. The idolators of classical politics, finally, seek to make all of life a test of virtue in the public arena according to standards of duty, sacrifice, and consensus. Most of us, one hopes, are not ideologues in this singular sense but are prepared to seek reconcilation between different perspectives, since they all contain something that people find precious in our modern democracy. However, such reconciliation cannot be a mechanical juxtaposition based on a mere salute to pluralism or a sentimental rhetoric of unity. These perspectives conflict in principle and, as every academic knows, their advocates often deprecate those to which they are not emotionally committed. Viewed in this light, social differentiation has led not to the disappearance of a public philosophy of civic education but to the emergence of a number of conflicting ones, all represented in the modern university in some fashion.

Professionalism. Let us consider briefly the second obstacle to a general recognition of the civic function of the university: the idea of professionalism in America. Historians are beginning to tell us much about the history of professionalization in America. Their accounts collectively make clear how intimately this process was and remains connected to debates over the nature of legitimate authority, its prerogatives and boundaries. Professionalism does not reflect the triumph of disinterested expertise, or at least not that alone. It reflects also the dominance, never complete and always fluid, of some rhetorical solution to a problem in social interpretation, coherence, and authority. The dramas of professionalization have generated strong pressures on democratic traditions. Consider these three dilemmas and their implications for those trying to define clearly civic educational standards for democratic decision-making and personal responsibility: a) the ethos of professional expertise versus the dignity of equal but amateur citizenship; b) the politics of the community forum versus that of the national professional association; c) the rational autonomy of the individual as a professional person who is also a citizen versus the national bureaucratic organization and disciplin-

ing of professionals by means of governmental, corporate and insurance regulations.

Citizenship. In light of all this, it should not be surprising that our clouded and abstracted sense of what citizenship means in a modern industrial democracy has become the third obstacle to a common understanding of civic education. As the history of the federalist versus anti-federalist debates on the ratification of the Constitution shows, there has never been much agreement on that score in America. And the trends discussed above have made defining citizenship still more complex and problematical. Space precludes an extended discussion, so consider some of the issues in shorthand form.

Is citizenship a legal status, an interest, an office, a role, a function? These terms reflect different contexts of political and moral thought. Is citizenship central or peripheral to individual lives? Whatever it factually is, what should it and can it be? If citizenship, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, today requires too many evenings, what sorts of social conditions would have to exist for citizenship to be central to people's lives? Is Michael Walzer correct to argue that if citizenship in a liberal society is central to people's lives in any sense suggested by the classical term "civic virtue" a price would be paid in the reduction of social tolerance? Is citizenship a condition of passive rights, activated when necessary by litigation or civil disobedience, or can it be a condition of active sovereignty (voluntary associations, citizen participation requirements, workplace democracy?) Obviously it has been both, but in an ad hoc and haphazard manner. Present talk of civic education suggest that some people are unhappy about this and desire a more coherent view. Is that possible and desirable? What is at stake? How, if at all, can education be made relevant to these questions today?

In the space of this essay it has been possible to make only two diagnostic arguments. One is that social circumstances exist which give the modern American university the character of a civic institution with quasi-sacred functions. The second argument is that other social circumstances exist which constitute impediments to the recognition and implementation of that status. This paper, then, is a call to thought about the university as something significantly more coherent than Clark Kerr's "multiversity." Such thinking, as I have argued, needs to be about the university as a whole, not just about the humanities or even the liberal arts curriculum alone. University life is the only time when the student citizen will encounter the full range of human knowledge in a unified place, with at least the presumption that training is subordinate to wider educational goals. At the present time the university is a microcosm of the pluralistic fragmentation of the larger society. Sentimental calls to unity will not suffice to generate much beyond vague formulations of "roundedness" and sensitivity to "values." Totalistic visions of education are rightfully to be rejected in a liberal democracy. Are there answers that lie between? There are, but they will have to await another occasion. The first step is to agree on the problem we face: that the university as presently constituted is not clearly good for anything that cannot be provided more efficiently in other ways. Without a solution to this problem, the university as an institution could be replaced by less expensive ways of doing research, of training and socializing people into society's division of labor, and of introducing those who desire it to the treasury of world speculative culture in a leisurely and recreational manner. The solution begins with recognizing that the university has potential civic educational functions which no other single institution can provide.

RESPONSES TO MANFRED STANLEY

Benjamin Barber

Manfred Stanley has once again contributed to the sociology of education and to the arts of citizenship. His essay on the American University as a Civic Institution makes a powerful case for the intrinsically political character of all education; it also offers salient evidence for the need to affirm the university's civic mission.

However, when he reviews "obstacles" to realizing the civic potential of higher education, he perhaps underestimates their potential for resistance and more importantly neglects what I would call the "purist" argument – one of the most stubborn obstacles. Let us posit three visions of the modern university, what we may call the civic/democratic model, the vocational/multiversity model, and the purist or liberal arts model. I suspect the primary obstacles to realizing the civic model are likely to come less from the corporate multiversity than from the traditional liberal arts college. For the liberal arts college, armed with a purist ideology, and defended by such allies of literacy as Allan Bloom and William Bennett, is unfortunately no friend of civic education.

If we wish to argue that the civic mission of the modern university is indispensable to the education of students for life in a democratic society, then it is the purist argument that has to be confronted. Purists are persuaded that citizenship education is not only at odds with liberal

education but undermines the critical responsibilities of higher educators. To persuade advocates of traditional liberal arts education that the tasks of civic education are integral rather than inimical to their conception of the university, as well as to give Manfred Stanley some tactical support, I want to offer several arguments in support of the natural alliance between liberal and civic education – particularly as they encounter the vocational or technical model of education associated with the corporate multiversity. The following points, which I will elaborate in some detail elsewhere, can be outlined briefly here:

1 – Liberal arts education and civic education for democracy share a common pedagogy rooted in critical thinking. Liberal critics of civic education presume that citizenship training entails idoctrination or, minimally, socialization into certain orthodox democratic beliefs. But political systems are rooted in open debate, free deliberation and critical discourse; to teach democratic methods is also to teach the arts of judgment – both private and public.

2 – A free university devoted to pure education in the liberal arts can survive and flourish only in a free society, which in turn depends upon the robustness of democracy. Even were it true (and I am suggesting it is not true) that civic education was not similar in spirit to liberal education, the powerful prudential relationship between the two would persist. If universities do not produce citizens as well as scholars, the democratic and tolerant climate on which free scholarship depends quickly erodes. Any one who doubts the connection between the two need only look at how fundamentalist Islamic societies only shallowed rooted in democracy have greeted the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*.

3 – The liberal arts university is also a community which functions, like all free communities, only when its member's acquire the skills and the arts of communication, cohesion and participation on which all communities depend. Rational discourse is itself an entailment of discursive communities which do not materialize out of thin air but depend upon a certain civic competence we call civility. The sociopathies that currently afflict American Universities (renewed racism, substance and alcohol abuse, alienation, suicide) are not contingent features of higher education, but central to what the university can or cannot do as an educational institution. Thus, civic education is not merely about how to live in the larger world freely and competently, but also about how to live in the university community freely and competently – something that must directly effect the character and quality of education even in the most insular of ivory towers.

4 – Finally, civic education and liberal education share a concern for the whole person that is at healthy odds with the sectarian, privatized, disintegral technicans produced by the professionalized vocational multi-university that is their common enemy. Indeed, even the professions have recently come to recognize the value of "ethics" and "citizenship" and "philosophical foundations" for medical, law and business training. These professions (correctly) perceive that to enlarge their vocational students' horizons is to confront them with moral and civic issues that both ivory tower humanists and civic educators recognize (ought to recognize!) as central to their common enterprise.

In short, purist advocates of liberal education and practical supporters of civic education share more than a common target population of students; they share a common mission – one the Greeks called *Paideia* and the German philosophers of the Enlightenment called *Bildung* – to give to the young and knowledge and skills and the arts by which they might flourish as free citizens in communities of discourse and communities of action. □

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Harry Boyte

I found Manfred Stanley's piece provocative and of considerable interest. But I strongly disagree with his privileging of the university as a uniquely important vehicle for "civic education" because I believe such a role reproduces, unintentionally, the very pattern of power (with its attendant epistemological assumptions reflected in contemporary political theory as elsewhere in academia) which a more populist, democratic civic republicanism needs to challenge.

To begin with the positive, I have considerable sympathy for Stanley's effort to resurface – and think in fresh ways about – the civic and public dimensions of university practices. It is an occasion for a wideranging, open, ongoing process of reflection and debate about the university's normative role in society. It seems to me that Stanley furnishes a more democratic rendering of concerns raised also by conservatives like E.D. Hirsh and Allan Bloom. All are efforts to retrieve potentially integrative and continuity-generating functions of higher education, in a cultural and economic environment which discourages integrative thinking of any sort about political values and broader purposes. Shoshana Zuboff, the astute observer of the "information revolution," recently made a similar argument in an interview with *Harvard Magazine*. New technologies create a "social amnesia" that obliterates strong value perspectives. "As the sense of how things were fades from awareness, we may be oblivious to what we're losing in the quality of our world," Zuboff argued. In

such an environment, higher education's distinctive "value" role (she doesn't use the language of civic republicanism, but is clearly getting at such issues) is more crucial than ever, "to remind students of the classical themes in human experience, create a sense of kinship between present and past, and heighten understandings of the continuities of the human condition. What we're talking about is preserving our humanity and our human values in a world whose forces and pressures and seductions tell us to believe in technology and technological solutions."

In this regard, Stanley is certainly sensible to resist the common bifurcation of education between scientific and interpretive systems of discourse, tradition and practice. On the one hand, as a lively contemporary challenge to Englightenment epistemological assumptions has helped make clear, scientific traditions and methods are themselves always embedded in interpretative and contextual schema. On the other hand, in pragmatic America any effort to preserve humanistic concerns that detaches them from science, technology, economics and the like is a formula for disaster. The humanities might survive as a "precious" enclave, but they would, under such conditions, be increasingly seen as sentimental fluff, removed from any serious business.

But there are considerable weaknesses in Stanley's argument, reflected in a good deal of other contemporary neo-republican argument as well, and they are embodied in his prescriptive views. Most notably, Stanley seeks to retrieve what he calls a classical understanding of politics as being about "the deepest concerns we all have as human beings," in contrast to a notion of politics as power relations.

The problem is that such a classical view of politics is drawn from the experience of small, face to face community (from the Greek polis through Renaissance Italian Republics to the towns and villages of 18th and 19th America). It assumes basic agreements and at least implicit cultural homogeneity about questions like "the deepest concerns we all have." This is reflected in the sharp, customary separation neo-republican writers make between "self-interest" and civic virtue, or concern for the common good. Moreover, it is able to separate "power" from "politics" because of the assumption of an easy agreement about the normative movement of healthy politics toward horizontal relationships. In this view, most people should (and rational people certainly "would") agree, politics is constituted out of face to face exchanges and deliberation among equal citizens.

William Sullivan put clearly this classical view of politics in his recent *Reconstructing Public Philosophy*. In place of liberalism's focus on the self-interested individual, Sullivan urges a richer view of citizenship tied to what he terms a "commonwealth" understanding of political culture not unlike Stanley's. For Sullivan, commonwealth means a "covenant morality," or the agreement that "as citizens we make a promise to show care and concern to each other." Such a "way of life ... begins not with self-interest but with the moral culture of justice, dignity, and fellowship." Indeed, "it stands in opposition to the life of self-interest" and "is possible only when members of community trust and respect each others." Its aim is "universal sympathy" that grows from a "mutual commitment to a common good."

In a world of "attack ads" and growing racial, economic, and cultural polarization, such appeals have undeniable pull. But they are based on a world of smaller communal interaction that has in the main disappeared. Trust, respect and a common commitment to communal welfare are just what we have lost, and exhortation (either from politicians or academicians) to retrieve them simply sound like abstractions to most citizens.

Interestingly, the "commonwealth" tradition of citizen politics, invoked by both Sullivan and Stanley, had a different set of meanings. Commonwealth carried classical republican overtones of citizen self-government, especially in America where colonists drew on 17th century English usage of the term which had subversive overtones, after the Cromwellian era, meaning a government of the whole people rather than the crown. But the centerpiece of the tradition was the question of power. Commonwealth meant commons, not only the town square but the tangible public goods (wood lots, streams, paths, schools, meeting halls and so forth) over which citizens exercised reponsibilities and authority. Such traditions carried into the modern world in the populist rendering of "cooperative commonwealth": a call for popular control over the levers and instruments of social life (transportation, credit, communications, schools and the like). Most 20th century historians of American politics have missed that point. In debating the reasons for what was "missing" (any large socialist or labor party), they neglected what was in fact there as an alternative. In the United States, the commonwealth tradition of politics stood for a view of popular agency, citizen power over the commonwealth, that was different than either capitalism (with its focus on the marketplace) or socialism (with its focus on the state).

The 20th century welfare state and its accompanying regime of expertise progressively eclipsed this commonwealth tradition. In particular, a scientifically derived understanding of knowledge became constitutive of the new forms of power that shaped everyday experience, from childrearing to medicine, from the law to education, undermining older conceptions of craft knowledge mediated through communal experience, tradition, and "common sense." The construction of the 20th century welfare state enshrined a view of knowledge as professionalized, codified in specialized domains, drawing from a positivist epistemology that assumes the detached and rational observer as the best arbiter of "truth" and the most qualified problem solver.

To be fair, Stanley points to professionalism as an obstacle to the civic function of the university. But he neglects to explore the ways in which universities came to reproduce, reflect and sanction a detached, "objective" standard of knowledge and knowledge-generation in their very construction. Today, universities carry on this process. Their view of knowledge is also visible in the more specific activity of political theorizing. Like academia as a whole, political theory detaches the knowledge-generating process from the real and turbulent everyday life-worlds of ordinary human beings.

For instance, academic medicine and psychology are far behind the self-help movement in understanding critically important aspects of "health" and preventive medicine; political science has yet to produce a single significant study on the door-to-door canvass, a practice of public interest politics which has (with many complicated effects) greatly affected lobbying and campaigning in recent years; schools of education are customarily removed from new experiments like local site school management or public school choice.

Political theory has its own version of such insularity. Almost no consideration has been yet given in the field to what themes like "public life," "citizenship," "civic virtue" or even "politics" itself might mean in a modern, hetereogeneous, rapidly changing world. With a handful of exceptions, political theorists have neglected what the real world of civic practice might have to offer as potential contributions to an updated rendering of "classical themes." Both the rhetoric of civic renewal and political theory are, in consequence, far distant from the angers, passions, self-interests – and democratic experiments – that move and shape actual human communities. If you ask young people what "citizenship" or "politics" means in most places in America today, "boring" is the best you will get. The question is, where and why do some have a different understanding?

We certainly need universities to engage in debate about and reflection on what their potential civic functions might be and a discussion that would include a direct challenge to the methods and epistemological assumptions of most academic disciplines. We certainly need a dynamic renewal of "citizenship education" in America. But when has citizen education, in any sense that had major impact on political culture, ever come primarily out of academia? As in earlier periods – the Alliance lecturers of the Populists, the Citizenship Education Schools of the civil rights movement – a renewed movement for civic education that has substantive effect on our politics will come mainly from "outside" formal educational structures. Indeed, it has already begun, sometimes on a large scale, in the best, most successful contemporary citizen initiatives that teach people the skills, knowledge, information and integrative concepts essential for effective public life and civic power in the modern "information age." Theorists of republican virtue today have important roles to play in civic education. But they need to spend somewhat less time imagining the ways traditional republican concepts might englighten the world. Their craft, and our politics, would be better served if they spent more time exploring how the world might reconstruct the tradition. □

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John Cooper

Manfred Stanley places a challenge before the American university by suggesting that it has become "a civic institution with quasi-sacred functions." It is "civic" because, whether publicly-supported or independent, the university occupies a central role in the public square, in the social construction/social maintenance process in this country. It is "quasi-sacred" because it aspires to a holistic vision of truth and the good, in the classical sense of the philosophers, with or without a theological-transcendent referent.

Furthermore, says Stanley, the university itself is profoundly ambivalent about its civic and quasi-sacred character. After all the present situation arose as much from adventitious social circumstances as from a conscious attempt by administrators and faculty to make the university a matrix of public value-formation. Stanley's thesis about the nature of the university is profoundly instructive. He has, I would agree, correctly diagnosed the societal obstacles to the university's role as a keeper of the civic health of America. I want to suggest that, properly understood, these obstacles can become opportunities for the American university.

Social differentiation, or what we might call institutional compartmentalization, occurs when specialized institutions generate their own meaning systems and, thus, their own competing public philosophies. Stanley mentions the market, professions, corporations, the polity, and religious communities. We might add the media, the labor union, the generational cohort, and the voluntary association (which Stanley classifies under the polity). Indeed, when the various institutions in a pluralistic society have radically different visions of reality, dislocation and even revolution can result. The most recent such period in American history was the 1960s, but there have been other similar periods like the Revolutionary era, the Civil War, and so forth.

Social differentiation becomes an opportunity for the university and for society when it becomes the focus of a

pedagogical strategy that examines all societal phenomena as interdependently determined. In other words, differentiation need not and should not become compartmentalization. We ought to teach young people that, just as there are three branches of government – executive, legislative, and judicial – there are three sectors of society – the political, the economic, and the moral-cultural. Like government, these sectors do and should operate in a check-and-balance relationship to each other. The genius of our system is *freedom:* in politics that means democracy, in economics it means market choice, in culture it means pluralism (defined as tolerance, not relativism).

According to Stanley, professionalism is a second obstacle to the university's fulfillment of its mission. When professionalism becomes a vehicle for the aforementioned institutional compartmentalization – and a code-word for a certain form of self-justifying *gnosis* that is immune to all external criticism – it is indeed an obstacle. But, professionalism can become an opportunity rather than an obstacle when faculty and curricula emphasize the historical roots of the idea of a profession. The medieval monastics were the first "professionals" because they professed a belief, they served a cause (the Christian evangelization of society), and they saw themselves as promoting the common good. With the Reformation emphasis on *vocation*, a parallel concept, the same core ideas were propogated. But when "professional" came to mean "expert," the idea was subtly modified to connote a function independent of, and sometimes even preying upon, society. The university must recover the authentic notion of professionalism as vocation in the service of the common good.

Thirdly, says Stanley, the idea of the university as a civic institution is hampered by a "clouded and abstracted sense of what citizenship means." Does wisdom in public policy matters rely exclusively on experts, professional pundits, and politicans? Are citizens the passive objects of imputed rights devoid of any positive obligation to community-building? A better view of citizenship would underscore the fact that, when it comes to the most important decisions in our lives, the "values" decisions, everyone is an expert. Amateur citizenship is the only genuine citizenship. So it ought to be informed, self-critical, a refined art. Furthermore, there is no harm in proclaiming one's values as a citizen and engaging in *civic* and *civil* discussion with other citizens speaking out of other values systems. Genuine toleration in a genuinely pluralistic society means, as Richard John Neuhaus says, talking about "differences that make a difference." When this perennial task of civic dialogue becomes real – in institutions, in communities, in the lives of persons – a genuine civic faith can emerge. That is to say, true civic discourse can generate a common set of commitments: to truth, to democratic procedures, to solidarity and communal loyalty. Such a "civil religion" – to invoke a term that should only be used metaphorically – will be, first and last, a self-critical and constantly reforming public philosophy.

When the university teaches such a public philosophy, encourages a concrete and nuanced concept of citizenship, educates young people to take on the true disciplines of the professions, and counteracts the compartmentalization of social reality it can and should be, as Stanley so accurately puts it, a "civic institution with quasi-sacred functions."

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Suzanne Morse

Professor Stanley argues that the American university is a primary civic institution in the country with all the trials and tribulations thereunto. He illustrates this with a description of the evolution of higher education in the last 200 years and the societal pressures which have forced it to assume a civic role on the one hand and the counterforces that pull against that role on the other. Higher education has gone from an institution of the few to virtually a right for the many. With that has come the need for different responses to both the students and the world in which they life. What has happened civically to the academy is both natural and forced by a society that is more open and by the sheer reality of growth both inside and outside its gates.

When society was closed to many Americans, the civic role of colleges and universities was easier to define. That role was to educate white, upper-class men to assume leadership responsibilities in the church, in the community, and in the mercantile world. The academy did a good job of teaching a set of values which underscored that world and of providing students with the intellectual and social skills to advance the system. While the institutions wanted their students to think about the larger world, the early educational leaders wanted to distance themselves from the real world both academically and geographically. There was and is a great hue and cry to keep those relative professional pursuits out of the "college" environment. Many of the early colleges were placed as far away from day-to-day life as possible to create and preserve the cloistered, unaffected atmosphere.

But the academy has been forced to change. The type, color, and gender of students has brought different perspectives and different demands into the system.

Technological advancements and human resource requirements have caused a broadening of the curriculum even in liberal arts institutions. Urbanization and the interstate system have brought the whole country closer together. This means that Professor Stanley is right on target in his assessment of what has happened to both increase and restrain the civic role of American colleges and universities; they are, as he says, a microcosm of society. That is the critical point. The changes in colleges and universities have paralleled what has happend in all of society. In fact, they have mirrored the bad and the good and are now struggling with the same dilemma as the larger society – how to make the relationship between the governed and the people work, and how to create the atmosphere and public space to have a conversation about the dilemma itself and the necessary skills to meet it.

Colleges and universities have some of the same problems as society: limited resources, diversity, racism, bureaucracy. But they have two key assets – an environment that has cut its teeth on the civic skills of conversation, debate, thinking, and action and the civic leadership of tomorrow present every moment. Higher education can give to society something it cannot create on its own: a civic laboratory for attacking the social problems of a diverse society and the production of a group of Americans who are thinking about problem-solving in a different way. American higher education is indeed a civic institution and an essential one. □

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Bernard Murchland

A good argument can be made for the American university as a civic institution and Stanley's piece makes a start in outlining some of the parameters of such an argument. His remarks, however, prompt me to the following critical reflections.

1. Not much purpose is served by referring to the functions of the university as "quasi-sacred" or to educational problems as "theologies of reality." There are a couple of dangers here. First of all, it leads one quite precipitously down the path of hubris. The university is by no means the most important civic institution in society (law comes to mind as a much more important one) and to dress up education's mission in the language of religion is likely to puff us up unduly. But there is a deeper problem than hubris. Jacques Ellul has done good work on the changing perceptions of the sacred in modern society and he concludes that it is technology, not the university, that has replaced the traditional sense of the sacred, i.e. the object of our highest hopes and worst fears. Now the university cannot be conflated with the technological complex. And even if it could the sense of the sacred it yields is not a very desirable one. It is a bad sacred rather than a good sacred, as again Ellul's analysis shows. To the extent that the university has become the home of modern technology it generates a bad sacred. Surely Stanley doesn't want that!

2. Stanley is curiously silent about the university's responsibility to remythologize the language of citizenship. One could argue, and I think Stanley would be inclined to argue, that we have a weak sense of citizenship because we lack a language in both its connative and denotative aspects. But the university is doing precious little to provide such a language. The languages of the disciplines, which may be taken as the official languages of the university, tend to be narrow, technical, jargon ridden and ultimately mystifying. From this point of view the universities, far from serving a quasi-sacred civic function, are themselves the primary obstacle to desirable civic ends. I would add this inability to create a suitable civic language to Stanley's list of obstacles.

3. Some promising lines of reflection are all too briefly touched upon, the limitations of space notwithstanding. One is the "educational-philosophical linkage between the humanities and social sciences." I wonder what that linkage would look like, how it might change present perceptions of those disciplines and what kind of offspring would a marriage of the two produce. The important question of "practices" is only briefly alluded to. The question here, apart from a fully developed notion of practices, is: to what extent are the disciplines themselves civic practices? Finally, there is only the briefest mention of civic humanism. In this regard, I would want to argue that the gravamen of any brief for civic education must take full account of that important strand in Western thinking. The question here must be: to what extent can the modern university embody the cardinal tenets of the civic humanist tradition? One signal feature of civic humanism as it emerged in the early Renaissance period was a double commitment to classical study, the *studia humanitatis*, and to civic participation. This was not an adventitious relationship; the bond between the two was intrinsic and causal. The civic humanists believed you could not be a good citizen without a firm grasp of the classics and the study of the classics in turn made better politicians. How far we are from such a view today!

In conclusion let me share a doubt that haunts me from time to time in discussions of this sort. America has got on quite well throughout most of its history with a weak sense of citizenship. Are our efforts to promote strong citizenship out of step with the constitutional tenor of the nation? I would appreciate Stanley's wisdom on that point. □

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Carl Pinkele

Stanley is probably accurate about at least two things: his first assertion – "there never has been a golden age of university of liberal arts;" and two, the university can be, perhaps even should be, discussed as a "civic institution." However, by my tastes, these two items notwithstanding, there is not too much here.

I have the following negative reactions to what he has offered us: First, there is neither a sophisticated nor a heuristic discussion of what the university as a civic institution might be – either in fact or in theory. His attempt (beginning in the section "the university's emergent civic function") does not meet the requirements of clarity or parsimony.

In Stanley's treatment there is an early drift toward a discussion of the humanities and a separation of the humanities from the social sciences (or at least, a purchasing of the emergent ideology of separation and its supposed evils.) Stanley is not too helpful about why one might care, or should care, at all about such a separation of materials. The separating line of thought and imagery recurs frequently in the essay, e.g. the discussion of "integration", "pluralism", "disciplines", and "professionalism." And, again, one must ask so what? How does the study of biology in depth become counter productive to citizenship?

The author's offering is chuck full of insinuations and random critical stipulations, many of them having achieved almost the level of liturgical conventionality among educationists and education critics and other ideologists; consequently, there is not much solid examination. Other than the fact that many assert it, why are those items listed in the "Obstacles" section problems, dilemmas, or whatever? Reiteration is neither proof of accuracy nor helpful.

Second, the piece is ahistorical – at best – and perhaps even anti-historical. There is no sense of the university situated within time and society. There is no sense of change, or dynamism, or (even) interaction between society and the university. Even though Stanley asserts there was no "golden age" I, for one, believe that he believes in fact there was just such an enticing environment. He harkens to a period in time when there was an integration of "knowledge" – although, by our standards today those long gone folks in many arenas perhaps didn't know much we need to be concerned with, unless, as I believe Stanley does, one believes in a golden tradition. I am reminded of a ninth century Islamic saying: "In nothing do we see learned men more prone to untruth than in the fabrication of tradition."

Stanley would be helpful addressing the following two questions: (1) In terms of civics, civic education, and citizenship, what is wrong with disciplines and specialized knowledge? and (2) What is a civic institution today, and is this the same or different from past periods? □

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MANFRED STANLEY RESPONDS TO HIS CRITICS

I would like to begin by thanking my commentators for their thoughtful, challenging and constructive reflections on my piece. In this space it is possible only to glance at the important issues they raise, but I will try to do so in ways that suggest an agenda for those interested in exploring our topic further.

Benjamin Barber believes I have underestimated the resistance of the American university to fulfilling its civic potential, especially the "purist" argument associated with the liberal arts rationale. In a helpful emendation, Barber distinguishes between three visions of the modern university and calls for negotiations toward an alliance between, particularly, advocates of the liberal arts and the civic democratic versions. In general, I agree with Barber but am less sanguine than he about the difficulties involved in positing, as he seems to, a "natural alliance" between the two. It may be helpful to our cause to note some of the difficulties that I think he overlooks.

Barber says that liberal arts education and civic education for democracy share a common pedagogy rooted in critical thinking. Is this so? It's interesting that Bernard Murchland, in this regard, takes me to task for not speaking of the need to "remythologize the language of citizenship." The present context does not permit space to explore this question of what diverse models of the university have in common, but it is very high on the pedagogic agenda of civic education. I agree with Barber that a certain rhetoric of critical thinking is shared by the civic education and the liberal arts traditions in a democracy, yet I am not persuaded that the rhetoric reflects the same methodological standards or intentions. The type of critical thinking generated by much of pure liberal arts tends to undermine commitment to any given social/moral order in the sense that philosophy is corrosive of any established intellectual conclusion. In his book on the history of the idea of liberal education, *Orators and Philosophers*, Bruce Kimball

traces the dual and conflicting traditions that comprise the liberal arts idea in a way that needs to be integrated into our conversation about the negotiations Barber wants to establish. That book, plus philosophical work on the concept of judgment, makes it clear that critical thinking is not a singular concept, and that practical judgment is not the same type of operation as intellectual critique. Barber, of course, knows all this so I am a little puzzled about his rhetorical willingness to ground liberal arts and civic education in a "common pedagogy ... in critical thinking."

Barber also is optimistically willing to assume that a free university can survive and flourish only in a free society. Of course when the contrast is with Khomeini's Iran, Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia the point holds. But I would remind Barber that a considerable degree of pedagogic freedom existed in British universities under conditions of less than robust democracy, and that a really robust democracy with strong populist leanings could prove quite hostile to the alleged "irrelevance", "effeminateness," "elitism" and Socratic "subversiveness" of pure liberal arts education.

Barber goes on to suggest that civic education and liberal education share a concern with the "whole person" that is at odds with the impoverished product of the professionalized multiversity. I am not entirely persuaded. The professional practitioner, even narrowly conceived, shares with the citizen a concern for the materialities and contests of experience, of which the pure liberal arts student is characteristically ignorant and toward which he or she often displays a monastic indifference. (Like commentator John Cooper, I'm encouraged by even the small signs of what he refers to as a return to a Reformation understanding of vocation in place of the current technocratic notion of mere expertise.) For this reason, unlike Barber, I don't consider the multi-versity *necessarily* to be the common enemy of the civic education and liberal arts models of the university.

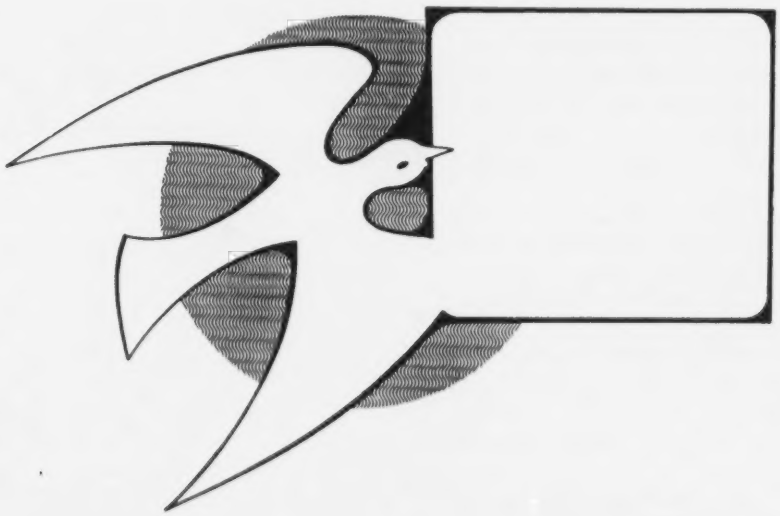
These critical notations are quibbles compared with the agenda Barber and I share. I introduce them to illustrate some of the conceptual and practical complexities of the "negotiations" to which Barber alludes.

Harry Boyte accuses me of neo-republican civic humanism. In fact, I tried to avoid directly identifying with that perspective (as noted by Bernard Murchland who, contrary to Boyte, criticizes me for exactly that). I am closer to Boyte's view than Boyte believes. That is why I criticize the humanities establishment for ignoring the social sciences, one of whose major contributions is studying the ubiquitous effects of power relationships in society. As a sociologist, I surely cannot disagree with Boyte's critique of the way neo-republican writers distinguish between self-interest and civic virtue, nor did I find any evidence in what I wrote of a defense of that distinction. Boyte finds that evidence in my reference to the classical understanding of politics as being about "the deepest concerns we all have as human beings." That latter phrase was a quotation from Lynn Cheney, and appeared as part of my critique of her understanding of that phrase. I do, though, share with Aristotle the view that politics is not just any old social activity because it is about the quoted phrase, most especially about conflicts between power relations and yearnings for common understandings of justice and other aspirations toward "the good society." Does Boyte disagree with that? I have some difficulty responding to Boyte because I agree with most of what he says and cannot tell where he thinks he disagrees with me. The only major disagreement I have with him is with his claim about the insularity of modern political theorizing. That may apply to political philosophy proper, but political theorizing is broader than that. It includes studies by historians and sociologists on the history of the university, of capitalism, of the professions, and the work of the microsociologists on the settings that produce decisions, rhetorics of social control, and the categories that define "reality." I also disagree with some of the nuances of the way in which Boyte discounts the importance of what goes on, and needs to go on, in the university, including the conversations designed to rescue some viable notion of "objectivity." But all of this is in the context of sympathetic agreement with Boyte's major compiaint: the manner in which our universities, along with many other institutions, have ignored the rich history of grass roots politics in America.

John Cooper read me in a most friendly and supportive manner. Yet, ironically, I want to dissociate my argument somewhat from the way he understands it. This is not because I want to be difficult, as it were, but because Cooper's version of me is less critical and more optimistic in tone regarding the difficulties confronting those who share my agenda than I am. In mood and substance, I'm closer to Boyte than to Cooper. First, I do not agree with Cooper's impression of what I mean by the quasi-sacred functions of the university. I don't think the university "aspired to a holistic vision of truth and the good..." I argue that the university is a quasi-sacred institution because it performs quasi-sacred functions, regardless of its aspirations. These functions arise out of the dynamics of its place in the social division of labor. As I shall later argue against Murchland, my understanding of the "sacred" is rooted in the sociology of Emile Durkheim which does not refer at all to the intended aspirations of philosophers.

Second, while I applaud Cooper's reminder that social differentiation is not only an obstacle but an opportunity, I disagree with the optimistic spin he gives it. The "genius of our system" may be freedom, but that hardly reconciles, under some benign order of checks and balances, the domains of "the political, the economic and the moral-cultural." "Freedom" has conflicting meanings between and even within each of these domains. That, and a host of other reasons, is why, third, I cannot agree with Cooper

that "true civic discourse can generate a common set of commitments..." The best we can hope for from civic discourse is that it be honest about the nature, sources and qualities of the difficulties that impede the search for common commitments. Then, perhaps, the differences can be negotiated in a more creative and reconciliatory manner. That honesty requires the right forums, or what Habermas calls "ideal speech situations." As Boyte would remind us, modern power relationships do not exactly encourage widespread distribution of such forums in settings where they could be effective. In short, regarding the civic agenda of the university, I think a much harder, less abstract, program of intellectual and practical work intervenes between 'now' and a more benign 'tomorrow' than Cooper's reading of me seems to imply.



To Suzanne Morse I can only express gratitude for her summary of what I had to say which captures the spirit and directions of my effort. She contributes an important portion of the fine work of progammatic encouragement, network building, and intellectual reflection that comprise the accomplishments, so significant for us all, of the Kettering Foundation in civic education.

Bernard Murchland's vigorously critical treatment of some of my arguments deserves a far more elaborate response than is possible here. He rejects my recourse to the language of the sacred; criticizes my failure to stress the university's responsibility to "remythologize the language of citizenship"; wishes that I had said more about the links between the humanities and the social sciences; and ends by wondering whether our whole agenda is "out of step with the constitutional tenor of the nation."

With respect to the language of the sacred: a) I never said the university was the most important civic institution in society. b) The intellectual context of my reference to sacred functions is the sociology of Emile Durkheim who, contrary to Max Weber, did not assume that the modernization of society spells its "disenchantment." Durkheim's sociology does not "dress up" things in the language of religion; rather it confronts the hubris of that language with an analysis of the sacred that makes it a more universally significant, and societally rooted, phenomenon than can be accounted for by the exclusivist claims for one or another sort of specialized religious revelation. Even so, out of respect for the mainstream religious understanding, I used the term "quasi-sacred." Further, the fact that Ellul concludes that it is technology that has replaced the traditional sense of the sacred does not mean that other thing can't play that role as well, as Ivan Illich argues with respect to the institution of the "school" as the modern church. Murchland also rejects my reference to "theologies of reality." What else does he think doctrines like "progress" or other models of historical "development" are? One doesn't have to agree on everything with thinkers like Eric Voegelin to agree with them on this. If I need a truly "theological" authority for my usage, allow me to claim Professor Arend Th. van Leeuwen, of the Catholic University of Nijmegen in Holland, whose Gifford Lecture volumes on Marxism as theology, *Critique of Heaven and Earth*, I commend to Murchland's attention. c) As regards Murchland's argument about 'good sacreds and bad sacreds', I don't know what those terms are supposed to signify. I had no intention of using the term "sacred" as a synonym for my or any one person's or group's ideal notion of the "good." So I

don't know what it is that Murchland thinks I "surely" don't want. I'm apologetically aware that those unfamiliar with the Durkheimian tradition in the sociology of religion will find this dispute arcane or pedantic. It is not such, but there simply isn't space here to explain why at length. Suffice it to say that trying to identify quasi-sacred functions of an institution is part of an effort to establish some consensus on that institution's public significance.

Murchland apparently wishes me to urge the university to "remythologize the language of citizenship." Perhaps contrary to Murchland, I don't equate mythologizing something with merely elaborating the connotative and denotative aspects of the words we use to name it. Doesn't Murchland worry about the conflicts of purpose inherent in the distinction between myth-making and critical reason? Absent any account of what he means by the term "remythologize," it would be unfair to criticize meanings he might not be prepared to defend. So let me simply leave him with the question: Is it the business of the university to mythologize citizenship (or anything else)? I happen to think an affirmative answer is defensible here, rooted in the argument that mythmaking is an integral and mostly inadvertent part of social life. But it is a long step from this observation (which it is legitimate for the university to make), to the argument that the university should deliberately foster a particular myth-making process. I think even this argument is defensible. But, as I'm sure Murchland would agree, it needs to be crafted and it will prove very hard to do that.

Murchland wishes I had said more about how the humanities should be linked with the social sciences. I heartily agree, can only plead the page limit imposed upon me which, while very generous, did not permit that sort of elaboration, and offer to submit as many sequels as he and our audience can stand. Given the space, I would especially take the opportunity to expound upon his insightful question: "to what extent are the disciplines themselves civic practices?"

Murchland ends by wondering if this whole issue of civic education is compatible with American constitutional values. His question has become the subject of debate among those (like Pocock, Ketcham and Diggins) taking diverse positions on the concept of civic humanism and its relevance to United States history. Regarding this, Murchland regrets that I don't say more. I didn't on purpose. The complexities of this concept (including the differences between the historiographical descriptive and the normative prescriptive literatures associated with it) are extensive. I didn't want my argument unduly associated with what I regard to be the conservative social control implictions of the civic humanist rhetoric when simplistically used. As it is, I went too far for Harry Boyte's taste, which should illustrate the risks. So here too I feel 'sequelitis' coming on.

Last, and least, there are Carl Pinkele's remarks. I must have somehow made him very angry because he seems to me to have departed from standards of civil discourse. He accuses my thoughts of lacking sophistication or heuristic usefulness, of being full ("chuck full", yet) of "insinuations" and "random critical stipulations," characterized by "liturgical conventionality" without "solid examination," "a-historical" (possibly "anti-historical"), and "drifting" in a "stream of consciousness." Indeed, Pinkele's perspective is so superciliously olympian as to allow him the presumption of telling me, in contrast to what I assert, what I believe "in fact". Since this litany of insults is unaccompanied by any actual arguments, I am somewhat at a loss to reply at all, much less constructively. I will bother answering only one of these charges. I frankly find the assertion that my piece is "anti-historical" and characterized by "no sense of change, or dynamism, or ... interaction between society and the university" to be incomprehensible. My whole piece is infused with exactly these qualities. Pinkele apparently has some difficulty recognizing historical generalizations when he sees them. Upon request I would be happy to share with him the extensive bibliographies in the histories of American society and political culture, the university, and disciplines and professions, and the institutions of capitalism which underlie the generalizations made in my piece. To end on a positive note, the homework assignment for me, with which Pinkele ends his comments, is sufficiently restrained to allow two important questions to emerge. They, especially, the first, need of course to be dealt with but I chose to leave them for another time in favor of introducing my topic as I did. Since the modest steps I did take apparently add up to a monumental affront to Pinkele's sensibilities, I'm glad I didn't risk more.

What questions have emerged from this collection of documents? Readers will have their own versions. To sum up, I think at least four questions are implied by what we have read.

1. How important to civic education generally is the university as an institution? (Note, for instance, the somewhat conflicting views of Boyte and Morse on this.)

2. How, if at all, should the characterization of the university as a civic institution be conceptualized? (See Murchland, Cooper, Boyte and Barber as well as my piece.)

3. Given multiple accounts of what the university is about, how should "negotiations" between their advocates be conducted, and toward what end? (See Barber).

4. Although none of us addressed directly the methodological issues associated with anyone's conception of civic education in the institutional context of the university, I think my method of conceiving the topic of higher civic education implied certain, undoubtedly controversial, approaches to that question.

It remains but to thank my corresondents again and to voice my hope that this debate will stimulate further fruitful and cumulative reflection on issues so vital to our nation. □

Books

Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economy, and Society by Carol Gould (Cambridge University Press, 1988)

Peter Levine

Carol Gould has developed an ambitious political philosophy using an ancient method. She begins with a small number of allegedly incontrovertible axioms of the "man-is-a-political-animal" variety and derives from these a whole series of postulates about the social world. Many of Gould's specific proposals for social reform seem highly attractive, but she chooses to defend them using the axioms of a "new social ontology" rather than by resorting to pragmatic, empirical arguments. Her position on worker management is a case in point. Gould argues for the expansion of democracy into the sphere of economics, envisioning an economy composed largely of worker-owned and worker-managed firms, the relations among which would be regulated by a free and competitive market. The workers in each firm would be free to allocate their collective wealth however they wished but the procedures they used to arrive at such decisions would have to be democratic.

This sounds like a reasonable compromise between the capitalist free market, which rewards talent and industry but produces *de facto* inequality, and state socialism, which has the potential to produce social justice, but only at the cost of individual liberty. Workplace democracy is not a proposal original to Gould, as she admits, but it is certainly worthy of a book-length discussion in English. Unfortunately, Gould stops short of the interesting questions that her model presents. For example, it is unclear how Gould imagines that her utopian social order could be established by peaceful means, despite the resistence of those elites who, she says, currently monopolize economic power. And if a violent revolution were necessary to usher in Gould's utopia, it is unclear how this could take place without empowering a new revolutionary elite which would in turn become unwilling to cede its power to worker-managed firms.

Instead of dealing with practical difficulties, Gould appeals to her "new social ontology" to ground her views. This ontology lies mid-way between the liberal view that individuals exist, atom-like, in fundamental isolation from each other, and the socialist theory that human beings are dependent parts of one organic, social whole. Gould argues for a compromise ontology of "individuals-in-relations." Similar ontologies have been worked out with some degree of rigor by Buber, Habermas, Gadamer and other philosophers. Therefore, her claim that her philosophy is fundamentally "new" should be qualified.

Gould advances her position by navigating among the views of other philosophers. For example, she develops her social ontology through a criticism of (among others) Jürgen Habermas, whom she accuses of failing "to give sufficient regard to individual liberty" in his descriptive theory of social relations. Thus she steers a path slightly to the "liberal" side of Habermas and quite far from the "socialistic" view.

Gould would have us believe that her view is value-free and grounded only in the universal truths of ontology which she has revealed; but, in fact, it depends from the start on Gould's own very personal priorities and values. If only she admitted this and tried to work out a defense of her (otherwise rather attractive) value-system, her book would be much more insteresting. Consider her view of human nature. Gould denies that she has any view of human nature, for she believes that humans are radically different in different circumstances, that it is impossible to set an objective value on any one style of life; thus there can be "no basis for one person or group to decide for another what the 'proper' common activities are." All that we can be sure about is that every human is free since "human life and freedom are generically identical." Apparently, this much is axiomatic. Therefore, all human beings should be left alone to develop themselves without interference. All forms of self-development should be tolerated equally.

Gould's assumptions about how all humans would choose to live if they were granted personal liberty remains implicit and unjustified, and consequently, she leaves many crucial questions unanswered: How should society act if one citizen's idea of "self-development" happens to involve torturing others? How would a culture that values social hierarchies and obedience to a landed aristocracy react to Gould's derivation of democratic values from an abstract principle of human freedom? Might not some nations (or even worker-managed firms) democratically decide to deprive themselves of freedom in favor of other goods: prosperity, power and domination, or a sense of discipline and order?

None of these are new questions; indeed, they are as old as democratic theory. But Gould offers no new responses to the perennial practical difficulties which beset democracy — some of which might grow into nightmares if anyone actually tried to create a society of worker-managed firms. Gould's proposals could certainly be defended in interesting and productive ways. Perhaps they should even be implemented. But she leaves the real work of forming pragmatic arguments, answering objections, and developing workable plans of action to her readers. Thus she fails to realize the promise of her title; she fails to "rethink democracy."

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Back Page Commentary

LISTENING TO WALKER PERCY

Bernard Murchland

I have long believed that at the heart of every work of fiction is a powerful philosophical idea and at the heart of every philosophical system is a powerful metaphor. This is the kind of claim a Saul Bellow or a Jean-Paul Sartre might agree with. I am almost certain that Walker Percy would agree with it. At the center of his fictional universe is a commanding cluster of ideas that are derived from philosophical sources and the way he is able to weave these into the structure of his novels makes him a writer of great distinction.

Percy's first novel, *The Moviegoer* (1962), illustrates the point. It bears an epigraph from Kierkegaard which reads: "The specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair." *The Moviegoer* tells the story of a young man named Binx, who works in a brokerage office in New Orleans. Outwardly his life appears to be happy and successful. Binx is well born, well connected and affluent. But he is bored. This, of course, is a familiar existential malady. One day succeeds another like stairsteps to senility. Life is not authentic; it is more inherited than chosen, more imitative than projective. That is why Binx is a moviegoer. Movies are a distraction that fill an inner void and supply him with a provisional identity. In the early part of the novel Percy gives a brilliant account of how the tentacles of mass society can smother the spirit. How Binx becomes aware of his emptiness, negates it and comes into possession of himself through choice constitutes the novel's drama. At the end, carried on a conviction of redemptive love, he commits himself to the ideal of service.

Although Percy lectures frequently I never had the opportunity to hear him until he delivered the 1989 Jefferson Lecture in Washington, an event that is sponsored annually by the National Endowment of the Humanities. His title for this august occasion was, "The Fateful Rift: the San Andreas Fault in the Modern Mind." The large auditorium was packed with Washington's high and mighty – ambassadors, judges, cabinet officers, noted authors, academics, think tank denizens and assorted bureaucrats. As I watched this goodly lot file to their seats I wondered how Percy would pitch to them. The answer, it was soon to become apparent, was high and outside.

Percy got down to business straightaway with an old-fashioned blast against science. "The world picture delivered by modern sciences is radically incoherent," he began. "They cannot tell us one word about what it is to be born a human being, to live, to die." Nor did he let up. Science is incoherent in its method, in its results, in what it says about man. It all has to to do, Percy went on to explain, with the ugly dualism that infects the Western mind. We have material things which science can explain in a dyadic fashion and we have the realm of human values which is comprised of triadic relations and which science cannot explain. Percy borrowed the language of dyads and triads from Charles Sanders Peirce, surely one of the most obscure thinkers ever to set pen to paper.

Peirce's reasoning in broad outline goes like this. Every thought is a sign and all signs can be divided into dyadic action (e.g. the influence of one action upon another as in cause and effect) and triadic action (which involves a thinking subject or what Peirce called the interpretant). The former is what scientific thinking is all about; the latter is humanistic thinking. Science explains all events in terms of dyads and the computer is the fruit of this outlook. But science cannot explain the interpreter, the namer, the mystery of human nature. Once the observer becomes part of the observed we have entered a dimension beyond science. Science does not take account of triadic events.

By invoking Peirce, Percy did little to clarify the case he was trying to make. But his Washington audience was tolerant and good natured about his strange speech. One of them remarked at the reception that it was a good speech but lacked coherence. Another was heard to say that she would rather by a triad than a dyad. I enjoyed the humor. But I think Percy was wrong about the nature of science, partly wrong about Peirce and above all wrong in his science bashing. These days it is somewhat déclassé to pit the scientists and the humanists against one another as antagonists. We are all co-laborers in culture's vineyard. As Richard Rorty reminds us, when humanists attack scientists and vice versa they are in the wrong game.

Pragmatism, Rorty says, does not erect science as an idol to fill the place once held by God. It views science as one genre of literature – or, put the other way around, literature and the arts as inquiries, on the same footing as scientific inquiries. Thus it sees ethics as neither more 'relative' or 'subjective' than scientific theory, nor as needing to be made 'scientific.' Physics is a way of training to cope with various bits of the universe; ethics is a matter of trying to cope with other bits. Mathematics helps physics do its job; literature and the arts help ethics do its. Some of these inquiries come up with propositions, some with narratives, some with paintings."

Rorty may not have it quite right either. But his view, it seems to me, is a more *humanistic* one. Percy has become a cultural institution and he remains one of the finest fiction writers in the land. But I like his ideas as they come through his novels rather than straight from the podium. I prefer reading Walker Percy the novelist than listening to Walker Percy the lecturer. □

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